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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 PRETORIA 002122

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PINR](#) [SF](#)  
SUBJECT: POLITICAL ANALYST WEIGHS IN ON ZUMA, ANC

REF: A. PRETORIA 1957  
[1](#)B. PRETORIA 1221

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires Don Teitelbaum. Reason 1.4 (b).

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: The ruling African National Congress (ANC) is currently in turmoil due to the ongoing battles between opponents and supporters of President Thabo Mbeki, according to noted political analyst Aubrey Matshiqi. Party deputy president Jacob Zuma's acquittal on rape charges and the subsequent May 14 National Executive Committee (NEC) decision to let him resume his duties have strengthened Zuma's hand in his quest to succeed Mbeki as ANC president in 2007. However, Matshiqi -- who is close to party heavyweights Tokyo Sexwale and Sam Shilowa but is even-handed in his critiques of all ANC factions -- noted that these gains are likely to be short-lived. He believes Zuma has a minimal chance of surviving his corruption trial, and many of Zuma's perceived supporters in the NEC and elsewhere are simply using him as a proxy in order to attack Mbeki without scuppering their own political ambitions. Matshiqi says Mbeki's long-firm support within the NEC seems to be eroding, and there are widespread rumors that Mbeki opponents and Zuma supporters will push to move up the ANC's 2007 national conference to elect new leadership, to take advantage of Mbeki's growing unpopularity. Whatever happens, it is increasingly likely that whoever succeeds Mbeki will have to be acceptable to both the President's supporters and his detractors. This reality may keep potential standard-bearers from the party's "middle" from taking sides in the ongoing fight. End summary.

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ZUMA REINSTATED AT MAY 14 NEC MEETING  
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[1](#)2. (SBU) The ANC's National Executive Committee (except for Jacob Zuma) met on May 14 to decide whether Zuma should be allowed to resume his positions in the party following his acquittal on rape charges (Ref A). The meeting, which apparently lasted into the morning hours of May 15, concluded with a decision to lift Zuma's suspension and to allow him to resume his duties as party deputy president and his participation in other party structures.

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NEC INCREASINGLY ASSERTIVE  
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[1](#)3. (C) Aubrey Matshiqi, a prominent political analyst with close ANC ties to Tokyo Sexwale and Gauteng Premier Sam Shilowa, told PolOff on May 15 that the NEC decision was largely a formality. He did not have first-hand information on the previous night's meeting, but had heard no prior

speculation indicating Zuma's reinstatement was contentious. That said, the NEC -- long perceived as a bastion of support for Mbeki -- was increasingly independent of the President's wishes. Matshiqi noted that the NEC's March 2006 decision to independently investigate the National Intelligence Agency's "hoax email" scandal (Ref B) rather than accept the report of the NIA Inspector General was a big blow to Mbeki, who had advocated acceptance of the IG report.

14. (C) Matshiqi said that he did not yet have a good feeling for how voting blocks in the NEC were aligning, but he thinks that generational trends have much to do with Mbeki's loss of support. Older members of the 60-person body with long-standing ties to Mbeki -- such as Minister for the Presidency Essop Pahad, Deputy Foreign Minister Aziz Pahad, and Intelligence Minister Ronnie Kasrils -- are most loyal to the President because they lack succession aspirations and are likely to retire when Mbeki's term ends in 2009. However, members in their 30s, 40s, and early 50s, many of whom depended solely on Mbeki for their rise to prominence, appear to be hedging their bets. Matshiqi suggested Deputy Finance Minister Jabu Moleketi and Deputy Home Affairs Minister Malusi Gigaba might be in this category.

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ZUMA SUPPORTERS, MBEKI OPPONENTS WANT CONGRESS MOVED UP  
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15. (C) Matshiqi said that many of Zuma's supporters, emboldened by his acquittal on rape charges, are quietly agitating for the ANC party congress to be moved from late 2007 to the beginning or middle of the year. Their reasoning is twofold. First, they believe that Mbeki is angling to have Zuma's July 2006 corruption trial delayed so that it is

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in its end stages during the party congress. If the congress is moved forward so that it takes place in the trial's early stages, they believe Zuma's chances of election will be greater. Second, Zuma supporters figure that Mbeki's resources will allow him to wear down support for Zuma over time. An early congress will allow them to strike before Mbeki is able to build his own popularity.

16. (C) Matshiqi noted that many Mbeki opponents also support an earlier congress, although not for any love of Zuma. The party leadership and rank-and-file are full of Mbeki antagonists who also do not want to see Zuma elected as party president. However, most of them believe Zuma is almost certain of being convicted on corruption charges. They gamble that if Zuma is elected as party president and then convicted and forced to step down, this would rob Mbeki of the ability to force through his chosen successor. Matshiqi was unclear whether the idea to move up the date of the congress could gather critical mass, but he said that the National Policy Conference scheduled for the end of 2006 (where the party will debate its congress platform) is where such a motion could be tabled.

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ALLIANCE PARTNERS TORN OVER ZUMA  
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17. (C) Asked about the Congress of South African Trade Unions' recent lack of enthusiasm for Zuma, Matshiqi said that COSATU is having its own leadership tribulations, partly related to Zuma. COSATU will hold a leadership conference later this year, and Secretary General Zwelenzima Vavi is fighting for his political life. He has taken flack over COSATU's Zimbabwe efforts, with many advocating greater focus on internal matters. COSATU's influential gender committee said prior to Zuma's rape trial that he should be presumed guilty until proven innocent. Matshiqi believes that COSATU's generally lukewarm support for Zuma since the start of the rape trial stems from Vavi's desire to mollify COSATU's female members and stay in control.

18. (C) Although more firmly behind Zuma than COSATU, the South African Communist Party (SACP) also is experiencing Zuma angst. While Secretary General Blade Nzimande and Young Communist League leader Buti Manamela have been two of Zuma's strongest supporters, the party's leading intellectual, Deputy Secretary General Jeremy Cronin, has been openly critical of the party's unquestioning support. Kasrils, who sits on the SACP Politburo, also has taken heat for his role in the Zuma rape trial. Many think that his personal friendship with the accuser and the fact that she contacted him before reporting the rape suggest he was involved in a conspiracy against Zuma.

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ZUMA FLYING HIGH...FOR NOW  
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19. (C) Given his rape acquittal and reinstatement as ANC deputy president, Matshiqi said Zuma is in a good position right now, but he does not expect it to last. The corruption case against Zuma is extremely strong, and Matshiqi thinks a guilty verdict is likely. Also, Matshiqi argues Zuma will not fare well when he undergoes widespread scrutiny as a candidate. Matshiqi characterized Zuma as a populist with no ideas, saying even his current supporters are likely to be spooked by his inability to formulate a vision for South Africa's future. (Note: Matshiqi is clearly no fan of Zuma, but his writings and media appearances have shown him to be even-handed in his critiques of various camps in the ANC. End note.) His backers from the left may panic should Zuma appear likely to win the ANC presidency, given Zuma's clearly stated free-market preferences. Matshiqi said few of the business leaders he has spoken with about a Zuma presidency expressed any reservations. The only big change they anticipate is that Zuma's strong backers in the Indian business community would be likely to receive a bigger share of the government spending "pie."

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SUCCESSION JOCKEYING ON BACK BURNER  
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110. (C) Matshiqi said that ANC succession jockeying is quiet following Zuma's acquittal. No one with an eye on the presidency is willing to stick his or her head out because there is a perception that Mbeki has political "empty

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coffins" waiting for anyone who declares an interest. As long as the pro- and anti-Mbeki camps continue to battle, viable potential successors are likely to lie low. Matshiqi said the shame of it is that the "middle" of the ANC, which generally supports Mbeki's policies but not his autocratic leadership, has been browbeaten by the President into staying silent. This middle, which he believes constitutes more than two-thirds of party members (as well as potential candidates like Sexwale and Cyril Ramaphosa) could prove a unifying force, but they lack a standard bearer to lead them. Ultimately, Matshiqi believes that neither Mbeki's supporters nor his detractors will win outright control over succession, so the next ANC president will have to be someone palatable to both camps. (Note: Observations of Matshiqi and others on the various candidates will be reported septel. End note.)

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COMMENT  
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111. (C) Matshiqi is one of the Mission's most astute and knowledgeable contacts on ANC developments, and despite his admittedly close ties to Sexwale and Shilowa, he is even-handed in his critiques of the party. Since leaving Shilowa's office in 2000, he has worked as an independent analyst and has consulted for several political parties, including the ANC. His comments suggest that the party faces

a difficult period in the runup to next year's ANC congress. With no opposition party in a position to take advantage of the vulnerabilities presented by the ANC's internal rivalries, the party lacks external motivation to resolve succession in a timely fashion. The bigger question is the effect such battles have on the political development of the ANC and South Africa as a whole. With no viable challenger to ANC dominance in 2009, the democratic process of choosing South Africa's next president essentially unfolds within ANC ranks. If succession discussions are handled in a transparent and inclusive way, the battle may force the party to hammer out internal differences, conduct necessary policy discussions, review the relationship with alliance partners, and unite its ranks behind a common vision for South Africa's future. If not, the party risks eroding loyalty and increasing apathy among the rank-and-file, particularly first-time voters who will have no personal memories of struggle days. Rival camps' abuse of the state apparatus, as in the intelligence scandal, to fight their battles is worrisome as well.

¶12. (C) Comment continued: How the battle for the ANC will turn out is anyone's guess, but Thabo Mbeki will largely define it. As Matshiqi and several others have noted, Mbeki is committed to a successor who will carry on his modernizing vision for both South Africa and the rest of the continent. His manipulation of the party and some of his political decisions (such as his imposition of female candidates during the March 2006 local elections despite local opposition) may impede his ability to influence the debate. While he has clearly negated any suggestion of amending the constitution to permit him a third term as President, Mbeki's refusal to rule himself out as a candidate for the party presidency also is mobilizing his opponents. Nevertheless, Mbeki's proven skill at manipulating party structures should not be underestimated.

TEITELBAUM